



A Guide to Concrete Countertops

Why choose concrete countertops?

Concrete countertops are the most unique, personal countertop option because they are made from scratch for each client. To determine whether concrete is right for you, think about whether you believe that:

- you want something unique and personalized
- you want something that looks natural and has character
- you appreciate high-quality, hand-crafted items
- you think granite is too shiny, too formal, too common
- you think synthetic solid surface materials look and feel like plastic
- you need a color or visual texture that's not available with other countertop materials

If so, concrete countertops may be right for you.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of concrete compared to other countertop materials?

Advantages:

- **Custom:** Concrete is completely custom and made to your specifications. Your designs will be brought to life by concrete artisans with natural materials. Your countertop will be unique to you and highly personalized.
- **Versatile:** Concrete is extremely versatile. It can enhance any style, from French Country to **Contemporary**; from Arts and Crafts to Industrial; from Traditional to Modern. The possibilities are endless.
- **Practical:** Concrete Ideas proprietary sealer provides a surface that is extremely stain-resistant and low-maintenance. Common food items will not stain it. The sealer does not degrade, and therefore does not need to be reapplied every year like many other sealers. The sealer also exhibits great heat resistance.
- **Imperfections:** Concrete countertops are hand crafted. Since concrete is a heterogeneous mixture of many different ingredients, subtle variations in color, shade, texture and overall appearance should be expected. All concrete is susceptible to harmless hairline cracks. They will sometimes appear months or years after installation, and are generally a result of seasonal movement of the cabinets and the house itself. These should be considered part of the aesthetic charm of concrete, and not a defect. Concrete exhibits natural beauty rather than plastic perfection.

Disadvantages:

- **Staining:** Concrete countertops behave similarly to granite in this regard. Granite countertops are also porous and have to be sealed and maintained. Most people don't realize this, because granite is usually too dark and patterned to show stains. Food, acids and oil will not stain your countertop if wiped up immediately.

- **Scratching:** While the sealer is extremely durable, it is possible to scratch it. For example, in kitchens, you should use cutting boards on concrete countertops.
- **Lead time:** Concrete countertops are hand crafted-nothing is done by machine. The process takes approximately 4 weeks. See the section on lead time for more details.

How much do they cost?

Even though it is a completely custom material, concrete is competitive in price with high end granite, ranging from \$85 to \$100+ per square foot. A general rule of thumb is that as the labor requirements on a countertop increase, so does the price. For example, we offer fiber optics embedded in your countertop. As this is a very labor-intensive process, the price increases accordingly to approximately \$200 per square foot. We are happy to work with you and your designer to give you an estimate on your project, and we can help you with options to fit your budget.

Where can I use concrete in my home?

- Concrete Ideas makes concrete countertops for kitchens (both indoor and outdoor), bathrooms, fireplace mantles, tables, desks, and anywhere else countertops are required. Horizontal countertops must be at least 1.5" thick. Concrete Ideas can make thicker countertops as well as fabricate front edge returns up to 6" deep.
- Concrete countertops can be straight, curved, notched, multi-level, etc. Unlike granite, which would drastically increase in cost for curved shapes, creating curved concrete shapes simply involves some extra complexity and labor in forming.
- Concrete can also be used in vertical applications such as backsplashes and fireplace surrounds. For vertical applications, concrete is generally ¾"-1" thick.
- Maximum slab length is 12 feet. Seams are located where structurally required. Concrete Ideas will work with you to design seam placement that is both structurally sound and aesthetically pleasing. Seams are typically 1/16" wide, similar to tile grout lines. However, it is important to realize that concrete countertops are hand made and hand processed; they are not machine cut, so tolerances for seams are more generous than with granite.
- Integral and vessel sinks are possible. See the section on sinks for more information.
- Concrete countertops can be used both indoors and outdoors.
- Concrete floors involve a different process. We can recommend other concrete artisans who specialize in floors and outdoor walkways.

What colors are available?

Any color! Concrete Ideas has developed hundreds of colors including every color on the spectrum. Any color can be produced in a solid, speckled or variegated pattern. You can specify embedded stone, glass, or other objects. You can specify the color, size and density of embedments. Coupled with the many color choices, you have myriad design options.

Will you make samples?

Creating your unique design in concrete is a process. Concrete Ideas specializes in custom color development. We can customize existing colors or match the color of an item such as a paint chip or fabric. Following our initial consultation, Concrete Ideas will manufacture two full size samples, at no charge to you. This process will take approximately 2 weeks. If you require further samples, we will create two additional samples at a charge of \$150.00/set. This charge will be credited to your final invoice if you choose Concrete Ideas products.

How much color variation can occur?

Concrete is a natural, handmade material. Many factors such as humidity, sand lot and cement lot can affect the final appearance of the concrete. All of our color formulas record the type of sand, type of cement, and exact measurements of pigments to 1/10th of a gram, and we use specially developed software to calculate mix design. However, colors can still vary because of the aforementioned factors.

Another factor that contributes to perceived variation is simply the size of samples. A 3" x 3" sample, or even a 12" x 12" sample, will look different than a whole countertop simply because the small sample does not capture all of the natural, random variations that will occur over a large surface. The color in a 3" x 3" sample may appear completely uniform, but a whole countertop in that exact same color will not appear as uniform. The same situation occurs with other natural materials such as granite. If you are looking for perfect uniformity, solid surface might be a better countertop option for you.

What edges are available?

For concrete, edging is formed and cast rather than cut like granite or solid surface. The standard concrete edge choices include eased and roundovers. Upgraded edges include cast bullnose, split rock face, egg and dart, dentine and rope. Edging may be placed on top or bottom of the countertop. Together we can create your choice of edge.

What kind of sinks can be used with concrete countertops?

Concrete Ideas concrete countertops can accommodate all types of sinks including vessel, drop-in, undermount, integral and apron front. The minimum lip of concrete around all sides of sinks and cooktops is 3".

Concrete Ideas creates beautiful integral sinks for vanities and bathroom. However, we do not make or recommend integral concrete kitchen sinks for engineering reasons. Kitchen sinks are deep and have angles that would put large stresses on the concrete and have high potential for cracking. Also, the size of kitchen sinks generally dictates a very thick concrete bottom that would be a problem with standard plumbing and cabinetry.

What about backsplashes?

Backsplashes are cast and finished separately and deck mounted after the countertops are installed. Backsplashes are nominally 1 inch thick and can be from 3 inches high to full height.

Will concrete countertops stain?

Bare concrete is very porous and will readily stain. Virtually all concrete countertops are sealed to prevent staining; however the degree to which these sealers works varies significantly. Concrete Ideas' sealer is a high-performance sealer that is exceptionally durable and provides excellent resistance to incidental contact with staining agents such as red wine, lemon juice and olive oil.

Will they scratch?

The sealer is durable, but it can scratch if cut with a knife or subjected to heavy, sharp objects dragged across the surface. Cutting on the concrete may compromise the integrity of the sealer and allow stains to permeate the concrete matrix. Cutting on the concrete will also ruin knives, requiring a professional sharpening to reshape the damaged edge. Remember, concrete is made with stone, the same thing used to sharpen knives (and will therefore dull them just as easily). If you do scratch a countertop, you can easily repair it yourself using the Concrete Ideas Touch-Up Kit.

Can I put hot pots on the countertops?

Concrete sealer can microcrack if exposed to high heat. The surface will appear "crazed". As with almost all types of countertop surfaces, it is best to use trivets.

How are concrete countertops made?

All of the slabs are precast in our studio and fully finished and sealed prior to installation.

When it comes to concrete countertops, there are two basic processes: cast-in-place and precast. Cast-in-place involves building forms and pouring concrete in place, directly on the cabinets. While this avoids the hassles of transporting heavy slabs, it does tie up the site for many days (or weeks), and it involves a messy process. In addition, cast (or pour) in place provides fewer options and less control over the finished product. Generally the only finish available is a trowelled surface, which is either acid stained or colored with pigments. The quality of the concrete, the finished appearance and ultimate performance of the countertop are all hampered by the fact that it's all being done on site under a rushed time schedule.

Precast concrete countertops, on the other hand, move all of the processes off site into a controlled environment. In the structural engineering community, it is well known that precast concrete is superior to cast in place concrete, mainly because tighter quality control can be exercised. Curing, which is a critical step that is commonly misunderstood, can be closely monitored. Moving the process to a shop allows greater flexibility in terms of the look of the concrete. Glass, stone and other objects can be embedded; these require extensive wet grinding with diamond power tools to reveal the embedded objects. This process also hones and smooths the resulting surface.

What is the lead time? How does the process work?

Although countertops are one of the last items to be installed, concrete countertops should be selected as early as possible. Here is an outline of the process:

1. **Color selection**
 - o Concrete Ideas often performs custom color matching and submits samples for your approval. Allow about 3 weeks for this process. See the section on samples for more information.
2. **Templating**
 - o Templating is done from finished and installed cabinetry, and it takes less than one day.
3. **Fabrication**
 - o The typical time required to fabricate most concrete countertops, depending on their size and complexity, is 4-6 weeks. Note that the fabrication process may not start immediately after templating depending on how full our production schedule is. A good guideline is to contact Concrete Ideas at the beginning of the project, or at the latest one month before cabinetry is scheduled to be installed, both to allow time for custom color samples and to secure a spot on Concrete Ideas' production schedule.
 - o In the case of a residential project such as a complete kitchen remodel, homeowners are usually willing to wait longer for their custom-made, handcrafted concrete countertops. However, temporary countertops can be a way to minimize inconvenience. Temporary plywood countertops are one possible solution. Or, the contractor can preserve parts of the old countertop to provide some work surfaces.
4. **Installation**
 - o Because Concrete Ideas concrete countertops are precast and prefinished, installation generally takes approximately one day.

How are templates made?

Concrete countertops are templated just like granite. Templating is done after any existing countertops are removed, or after new cabinets are fully installed. If you're working with a contractor, your contractor needs to arrange for existing countertop removal. If there is no contractor involved, the homeowner himself can remove the countertops. Alternatively, we can also remove existing countertops for an additional fee. Concrete countertops require physical templates from the finished and installed cabinetry. In some cases, freestanding pieces, such as islands, can be fabricated from CADD drawings instead of physical templates. We will advise on templating requirements for your project. All fixtures that penetrate the concrete, such as sinks, must be available at templating time. Once the template is created, the homeowner or representative will approve the template with their signature.

What if I want to change my order?

We can accommodate work order changes after your initial order is received under certain conditions. If your countertop is not already under production, we will accept a "change order" signed by both the client and Concrete Ideas. There will be a \$150.00 administrative fee for each change order that is signed. However, if your countertops are in production, we cannot accept a change order.

How do I arrange for Delivery?

Immediately prior to your delivery, we ask that you or your representative come to the Concrete Ideas Studio in Ashland for final approval of your countertop. At that time, we request payment of the outstanding balance. We will arrange a time that is convenient for you to accept delivery. Please note that if the weather is inclement on your delivery day, there is a possibility that we may need to reschedule your delivery for the safety of the delivery team.

How are the countertops installed?

Concrete countertops are handled and installed just like granite. Seams are caulked with a color-matched acrylic caulk. Your contractor needs to arrange for plumbing and electrical hookup no earlier than 24 hours after the countertop installation.

Are concrete countertops "green"- do they have an impact on the environment?

Concrete Ideas countertops are the very definition of "green." We use a significant portion of recycled post-industrial and post-consumer materials in our proprietary mix. We also employ responsible manufacturing techniques, right down to the water that we use and recycle. Concrete Ideas is committed to encouraging reuse at every level of the manufacturing process. Especially today, in a time of focus on the environment, Concrete Ideas is always striving for sustainable solutions for each project. Finally, one very important aspect to remember about your Concrete Ideas countertop is that is handcrafted locally in Ashland, Virginia.

Are there any special structural considerations?

A square foot of 1.5" thick concrete weighs about 17 lbs; a square foot of 3 cm granite weighs about 16.5 lbs. Typically, no special considerations are necessary for standard kitchen or bathroom vanity countertops. Cantilevered slabs, bartops on kneewalls and similar situations sometimes require brackets or other structural supports for the countertops. Concrete Ideas can advise on support requirements.

Do you offer a warranty?

Yes. Concrete Ideas warrants the structural integrity of the concrete for one year after date of installation. The countertops will of course last much longer than a year, but if any problems were to occur, they would occur in the first year. We subject the concrete to much larger stresses while handling it than clients ever could once it is installed. In addition, Concrete Ideas provides each client with an Owner's Guide and a direct phone number for support. The warranty applies only to fully paid projects.

Do you offer a money-back guarantee?

Remember, the homeowner or representative approves the product before delivery. If there are details to be finalized, it will be done at this time. Because each countertop is custom made to fit into a specified and often very tight space, we do not remove countertops once installed. Removal of a top would cause significant damage to the surrounding structures. Once the countertops are installed, use constitutes acceptance of the product.

Whom can I contact with questions or to discuss a project?

Contact Stan or Noelle Webb, at our Concrete Ideas Studio in Ashland (804)789-6606. You can also visit our website at www.concreteideasva.com to view some of our projects and learn more about concrete. Whatever your design inspiration, the experienced design professionals at Concrete Ideas can help you create the exact look you've always wanted for your home.

Concrete Ideas Gives Back

For most of us, we consider our home an "emotional fortress." Our home soothes our soul and gives us a sense of security. However, there are families in our own community that don't have that sense of security. For some, even the most basic necessity-a bed- is lacking. This is especially distressing when it is a child without a bed. When you choose Concrete Ideas to help you create your inspired project, you enable Concrete Ideas to support the mission of "Beds for Kids." Beds for Kids is a local, non-profit organization, whose sole mission is to make sure that every child in our community has a bed. Thank you for supporting us so that, we, in turn, can support others in our community

